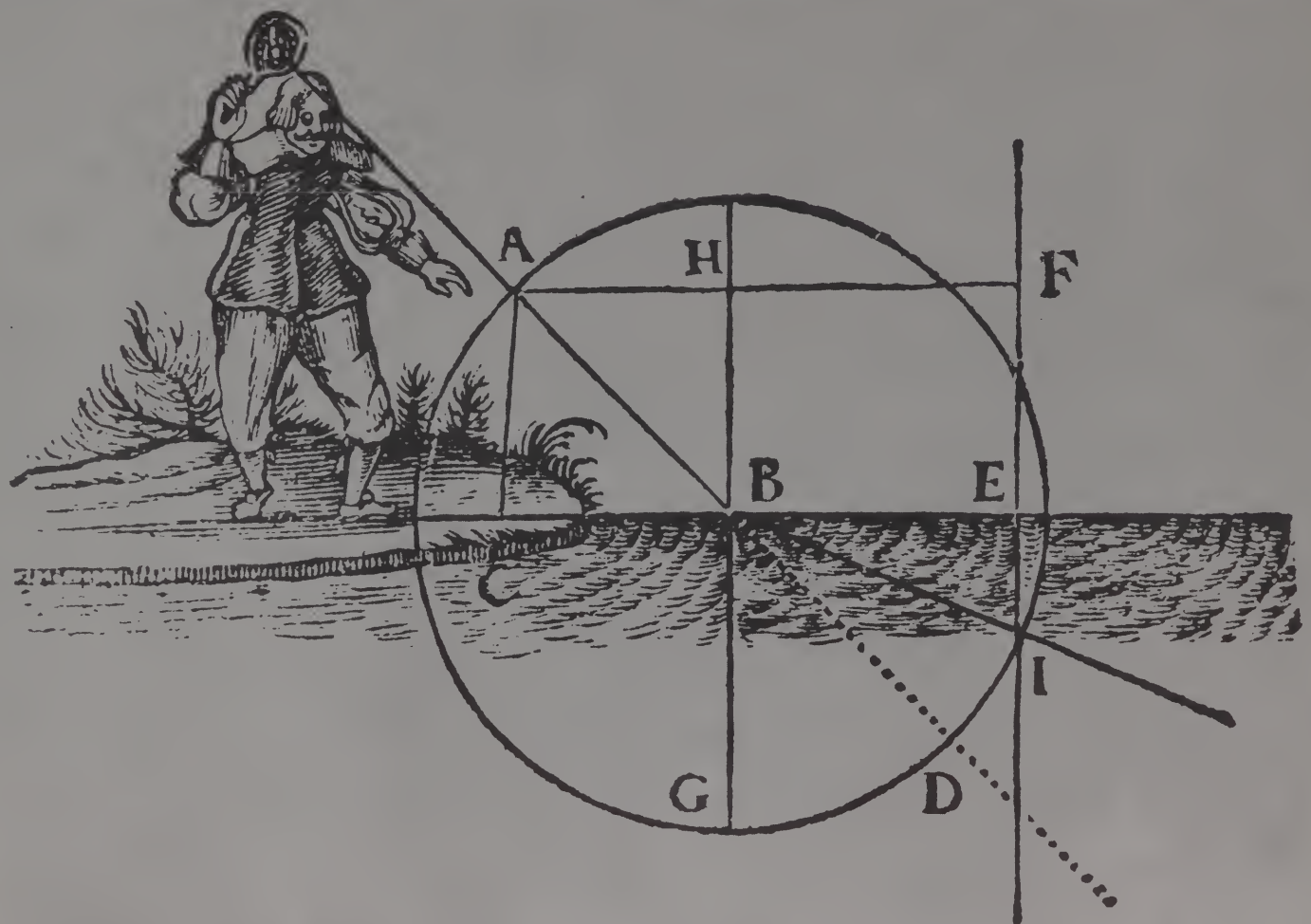


A BIOMEDICAL INDEX
TO THE
CORRESPONDENCE OF
RENE DESCARTES

by Thomas Steele Hall



Thomas S. Hall is University Professor of Biology and the History of Science Emeritus and former Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Washington University, St. Louis. His major historical works include Ideas of Life and Matter: Studies in the History of General Physiology, 2 vols. (1969); and a Translation from the French and Commentary on René Descartes, Treatise of Man (1971).

In 1984 and 1985 Professor Hall spent seven months as an invited special expert in the History of Medicine Division of the National Library of Medicine while pursuing his current research project on the influence of Descartes' ideas on modern medicine. The present Biomedical Index to the Correspondence of René Descartes was compiled as a special project growing out of Professor Hall's extended use of the NLM historical collections during that period.

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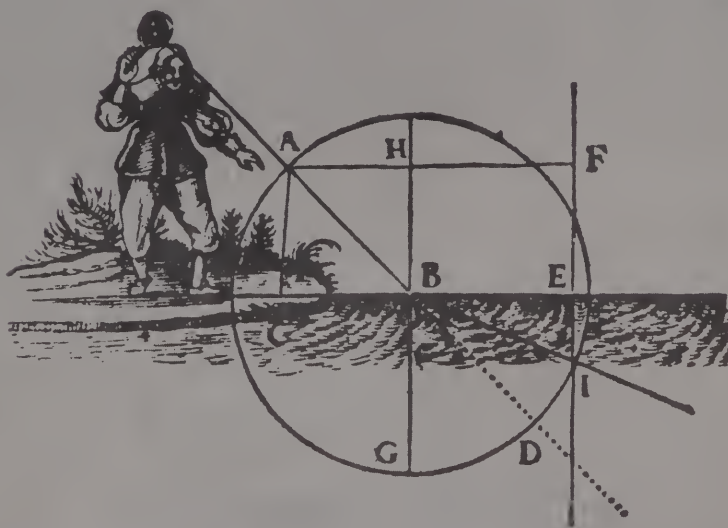
RENATI DESCARTES

EPISTOLÆ,

*Partim ab Auctore Latino sermone conscriptæ,
partim ex Gallico translatae.*

In quibus omnis generis quæstiones Philosophicæ tractantur, & explicantur plurimæ difficultates quæ in reliquis ejus operibus occurrunt.

P A R S S E C U N D A.



L O N D O N I,

Impensis JOH: DUNMORE, & OCTAVIANI PULLEYN,
ad insigne Regis, in vico *Little Brittain* dicto.

CLC LXXVIII.

Monographs: (wholly biomedical). Descartes wrote about biomedicine in monographs and in letters. Of the monographs some were devoted wholly to biomedical (primarily physiological) subjects. This was true of Descartes's *Treatise of Man* and his *Description of the Human Body* and of some sets of fragments, especially those entitled *Anatomical Excerpts* and *First Thoughts about Generation*. All of these works were published after their author had died.

Monographs: (partly biomedical). Other monographs were only partly biomedical in content. In them, biomedicine was portrayed in relation to broader scientific and/or philosophical subjects. These partly biomedical works included Descartes's *Rules for Directing the Mind*, *Treatise of Light*, *Discourse on Method*, *Dioptrics*, *Principles of Philosophy*, and *Passions of the Soul* (here named in the order in which they were written). All but the first two of these were published during the lifetime of their author.

Letters. The letters of Descartes began to be published in 1657, seven years after his death. In them, the passages treating medical matters varied in length from just a few lines to several pages. Recipients of the letters included major scientists and philosophers of science as well as virtuosi of varying stripe and, along with them, physicians (most of them authors) and a number of (primarily clerical) critics. With the critics Descartes communicated either directly or, more often, through the intermediation of his friend and mentor, Father Mersenne. Descartes also corresponded at length with a Dutch disciple Henricus Regius, sometimes previewing the latter's intended publications—lest readers attribute Regius's occasional biomedical banalities to Descartes himself!

Our *Index* will show that certain topics - among them animal automatism and the heart and the blood - were fairly fully treated in the letters whereas others, e.g. the brain and the eyes got surprisingly little attention, especially if we consider the importance that Descartes assigned them in the monographs mentioned above. Readers will find that certain letters (e.g. AT numbers 199, 199b, 407, 460, etc.) are cited repeatedly in our *Index* because they treat not simple or single problems but complex clusters thereof. As for the letters in general, in spite of their topical imbalance, they are critical for understanding the philosophical and scientific thought of Descartes. This is so because they often extend or revise and occasionally even disavow positions taken by our author in works written with a view to their eventual publication.

KEY: Sample citation: **AM**¹ or **AT**¹ 139² (3)³ 247⁴

Explanation of superscripts:

1: Edition cited, namely either

AM (= Ch. Adam and G. Milhaud, *René Descartes - Correspondance publiée avec une introduction et notes*, Paris, F. Alcan and Presses Universitaires de France, 1936-1963); or

AT (= Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Paris, Cerf, 1897 to 1910, republ., Paris, Vrin, 1957, 1967).*

2: Number assigned to the cited letter by the editors of the correspondance.

3: Volume number in the cited edition.

4: Page number..

*The citation **AT** is used in indexing letters originally written by Descartes in French; the citation **AM**, in indexing letters originally written in Latin but that appear, in the **AM** edition, in both the original Latin and in an Adam-Milhaud French translation.

The author of this Index warmly appreciates the advice and assistance received in its preparation from the staff of the Division of the History of Medicine, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

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*Descartes posited a cerebral micromechanism for reflexes but did not call them that; he did say that when they occurred the nerve action was "reflected" (*réfléchi*)

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